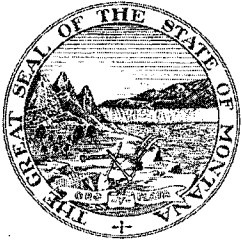


DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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January 26, 2011

Chairman Howard, Members of the Committee: My name is Jim Murphy from the Department of Public Health and Human Services. On behalf of DPHHS, I am here to oppose HB 227.

Staff of DPHHS reviewed HB 227 which would allow exemption from vaccination requirements in Day Care Facilities. We are concerned about proposed changes that will place children attending day care facilities, particularly those vulnerable because of their age, at an increased risk of vaccine preventable disease.

The primary reasons we recommend NOT passing this bill are:

1. Vaccines are highly effective: Vaccines are the most effective tool available to prevent once common, dangerous childhood diseases.
2. Highly vulnerable children attend day care facilities: Children less than 15 months of age have a high risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death from vaccine preventable infections. Because of their age, these children cannot be fully vaccinated to protect themselves. Unfortunately, the likelihood of disease introduction into day care facilities is high because our childhood immunization rates, while improving, are among the lowest in the nation. Once introduced, a disease can spread rapidly in a child-care setting due to the less than perfect hygiene practices of the children. In addition to those not fully immunized, young children with a religious exemption would be among the most vulnerable children in a daycare setting and this bill does nothing to protect them from harm.
3. Pregnant women and their unborn babies would also be placed at risk: Pregnant daycare workers and their unborn babies can be harmed by exposure to vaccine preventable infections. Both mother and unborn baby would be placed at unnecessary risk.
4. Attending daycare facilities is not the same as attending schools: Religious exemptions are allowed for school attendance. School attendance is required by law whereas day care attendance is not. And unlike day care facilities very young children with immature immune systems who cannot be fully immunized due to their age do not attend school.
5. Parents of the highly vulnerable children expect a safe environment: Parents who enroll very young children in day care facilities expect their children will be in a safe, healthy environment. Vaccination requirements protect children and assure parents that they are not putting their infants at an unnecessary risk of vaccine preventable disease.

The mission of DPHHS and our partners in public health is to protect the health of all Montanans. Please help us keep Montana's daycares safe by opposing this bill.

Dr. Steven Helgersen, our State Medical Officer, accompanies me and we are happy to make ourselves available for questions.